

Chapter 574

"I am still here," Liam growled, uncharacteristic irritation showing on his face. "Don't I get a say in what happens to me? I don't want to be like this. I don't want to be hurting people I love and placing them in danger. No one will tell me what happened up at the Praetorian Compound. Everyone is taking control of my life, making my decisions for me. Has anyone stopped to think that this complete lack of control may be why I'm struggling to deal with whatever the hell this is that's happening to me right now? If everyone thinks they know what's best for me, telling me what to do and how to act, then how can I ever expect to control this?"

Liam's outburst was so unexpected that everyone just stared at him for a moment, analysing his words. Could he be right? Had they been so intent on protecting him that they were adding to the problem instead of solving it? Rafe weighed up his words, frowning as he stared at

"We were trying to keep you calm," he finally said. "We didn't want a repeat of what happened up at the compound, but it appears that can happen wherever you are. Your emotional backlash affects vampiric minds faster than it does wolf minds. When you lost control before, six of the Praetorians had their minds wiped in some manner. They live, but the essence of who they are is gone. That was what we were trying to protect you from, Liam."

Liam paled, his breath rushing out on a harsh sound as he shook his head in denial. "No. I couldn't have done that, Rafe. They are my friends. They took me in, protected me, and welcomed me into their home." His head swung around to Elina, meeting her scrutiny and reading the truth in her eyes. "I hurt them?"

Images of Mallen on the floor crying out for him to stop flashed through his troubled mind. Liam shuddered as he recalled how Mallen lay there stricken, his hands pressed to his head as he curled up in pain. "I almost did the same to Mallen?"

Rafe nodded, his heart wrenching at the anguish on Liam's face. "We know you didn't intend to hurt anyone, Liam, but when you lose control you project your emotions outwardly and weaker minds buckle under the power that comes from you."

"Mine didn't."

The emotionless statement issued from the bed was so unexpected that everyone turned to look at Reasa. The former vampire was sitting up against the pillows, her arm wrapped in a sling, and the worst of the pain now cleared from her expression. Cassia was in the process of packing away items into the doctor's bag.

"I'm human now, so my mind should have imploded the instant he lost control," Reasa continued, "but it remained untouched. He should have taken Freya's head in a heartbeat, but he merely wounded her...and not very badly at that."

Freya pursed her lips, her agile mind replaying the scene as she began to grasp what the other woman was implying. "He's learning control." She turned to Rafe. "At the Praetorian Compound there was no control, just lashing out, that's why so many were effected. This time there was thought behind his actions even when it appeared there was none."

"We almost lost Mallen," Rafe growled.

"No we didn't," Elina interjected as she, too, understood the implications. "I've never tried to shield a non-Vârcolac mind before. Given the amount of power Liam was generating while he erected the invisible barrier, I shouldn't have been able to get through with my thoughts like I did. I was not only able to get through, but there was no resistance when I tried to shield Mallen. Liam let me through."

"Exactly," Freya continued. "Liam could have killed me at any point he wanted to. Instead, he knocked me down a couple of times and inflicted some shallow wounds that were healing as instantly as he made them. His aggression was controlled. Even though he was angry at my failure and needed to act on that, he didn't want to truly hurt me."

"The reason my mind wasn't wiped when it should have been, is due to Liam's need to protect me at all costs," Reasa added. "There is some control being displayed; he appears to maintain an awareness of external events at a subliminal level when he enters his fugue state. Over time, that control should increase, but he is still in need of a support network to help him reach the end goal. Once he can maintain his shields without even thinking about it, you will have one of the most powerful weapons known to exist."

The former vampire turned her head away from them, closing her eyes. "And you wonder why we fear and distrust these abominations."

Liam stared at her, his thoughts in turmoil as the room fell silent. He couldn't recall having any control over his actions and he was still reeling from what he'd learned about his previous episode. The pain and guilt he felt over hurting six of his friends had already begun to consume him. How could he have caused so much damage to those who only had his well-being at heart? How could he fix this? A part of him could understand Reasa's antipathy and hatred. Maybe she was right after all? Maybe they shouldn't exist if this was what they were capable of?

"I want to go to the Praetorian Compound." He uttered the words in a low voice but there was steel behind the words. "I need to witness the consequences of my actions, Rafe. If what everyone says here is true and I am subconsciously learning control, then what better way to hammer that need home than to see what happens when I don't learn it?"

Rafe frowned as denial rippled through him, knowing that it was going to be hard to argue with Liam's point. It would mean permitting Reasa to go with him, and though he wasn't happy about that, he knew it would be a necessity in case the Vârcolac struggled to deal with what he found there. "I'll talk to Mac. For now it is best if you go home, Liam. Spend some time with your parents."

Refusal blossomed on the young male's face, his expression turning

"I am in no position to cause any additional problems," Reasa remarked, her tone sounding dry as she moved her wrapped-up arm slightly. "Freya will have no further need to chastise me today, and even if she has, I prefer to remain where I am. I understand the rules here."

The vampire regarded her coolly, surprised by her statement. She'd expected Reasa to want to leave after what had happened. Perhaps she was still conditioned enough to being a vampire that she truly did feel more comfortable being in their home. Freya looked at Dayton, who gave her a smile and a shrug of his shoulders. He was leaving the decision up to her. "Very well. If Reasa chooses to remain here, then I will not argue with her decision. I have learned from my error, nephew. No more harm will come to her from my hands."

"Fine, that's settled then," Rafe replied as he turned to leave. "Liam, I'll be over as soon as I have set something up. If you feel your control slipping at any time I want your word you'll come here instantly and stay with Reasa until it passes."

The Vârcolac managed a half smile, his eyes running over each feature on his mate's face. "That's one order I have no problem following."